

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 02336 161421Z

43

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-11 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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SAJ-01 AID-05 /082 W

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O R 161330Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9033

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY THERAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NY

DIA WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 2336

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS,PINT, MILL, LE

SUBJ: BRINKSMANSHIP GAME UNDERWAY OVER TERMS OF FRANGIE  
RESIGNATION AND NAME OF SUCCESSOR

SUMMARY: POLITICAL CIRCLES NOW ASSUME FRANGIE WILL RESIGN,  
THOUGH HE IS GIVING CONFLICTING SIGNALS ABOUT HIS INTENTIONS.  
VARIOUS FORMULAS ARE BEING PROPOSED TO GIVE HIM DIGNIFIED  
EXIT. NEGOTIATIONS OVER WHO WILL SUCCEED HIM ARE PRO-  
CEEDING APACE, WITH ELIAS SARKIS AND RAYMOND EDDE NOW  
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 02336 161421Z

LEADING CONTENDERS. BYZANTINE BARGAINING OCCURRING

AGAINST BACKDROP OF TROOP MOVEMENTS AND THREATENED MILITARY ATTACKS. CONSENSUS IS THAT THERE WILL BE NO MAJOR MILITARY OUTBREAK NEXT 24 HOURS, BUT SPORADIC CLASHES ALREADY OCCURRING IN STREETS OF CAPITAL ARE KEEPING CITY ON EDGE. SYRIAN MEDIATORS EXPECTED MAR 16 OR 17. END SUMMARY.

1. THE POLITICAL ISSUE NOW BEING POSED IS NO LONGER WHETHER FRANGIE WILL RESIGN, BUT THE TERMS ON WHICH HE WILL RESIGN AND THE IDENTITY OF HIS SUCCESSOR. THIS IS THE ASSUMPTION OF MOST POLITICIANS, DESPITE NEWS THAT FRANGIE HAS JUST PRIVATELY PROPOSED A DRAWN-OUT PROGRAM FOR RESIGNATION INVOLVING A MILITARY CABINET, DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT, AND NEW PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS PROBABLY DESIGNED TO STALL THE RESIGNATION COMPLETELY. HE APPEARS TO BE THRASHING AROUND FOR A WAY TO AVOID THE INEVITABLE, THOUGH MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE HE REALLY SEES THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL AND HAS SO SIGNALLED TO VARIOUS PARTIES.

2. VARIOUS PROPOSALS ARE CIRCULATING ABOUT HOW TO GIVE FRANGIE A DECENT EXIT. NONE SEEMS TO HAVE WON GENERAL ACCEPTANCE YET. IDEA NOW HOLDING CENTER STAGE IS (A) FRANGIE SHOULD NAME A NEW CABINET UNDER A MARONITE RPT MARONITE WITH EITHER CAMILLE CHAMOUN OR GEN. HANNA SA'ID AS PREMIER, (B) PARLIAMENT SHOULD VOTE CONFIDENCE IN CABINET OR BASIS FRANGIE'S 17 POINTS, AND (C) FRANGIE SHOULD THEN AND ONLY THEN RESIGN. PRECEDENT OF BECHARA EL-KHOURY'S NAMING FUAD CHEHAB TO HEAD GOVERNMENT BEFORE HIS RESIGNATION IN 1952 FIGURES IN THIS SCHEME. ANOTHER PLAN SAID TO HAVE BACKING IN PARLIAMENT IS THAT CONSTITUTION WOULD BE AMENDED TO PERMIT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION THIS MONTH, AFTER WHICH FRANGIE AND PRESIDENT-ELECT WOULD SHARE POWER BRIEFLY. FRANGIE MIGHT THEN TAKE LEAVE OF ABSENCE OR RESIGN. THE "BATTLE OF THE FORMULAS" IS DEFINITELY NOT OVER.

3. SELECTION OF SUCCESSOR TO FRANGIE TAKING PLACE IN HOTHOUSE ATMOSPHERE. ASSUMPTION IS NEW PRESIDENT CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 02336 161421Z

MUST BE AGREED UPON BY CONSENSUS AS PART OF FRANGIE RESIGNATION ACCORD; PARLIAMENT'S VOTE WOULD BE RUBBER STAMP. RAYMOND EDDE EMERGING AS A LEADING CONTENDER BECAUSE OF BACKING HE PRESUMED TO HAVE AMONG TRADITIONAL MOSLEM LEADERS AND LEFTISTS. ALTHOUGH PIERRE HELOU IS CONSIDERED FAVORITE OF JUMBLATT, BEING VAGUELY LEFTIST AND MORE MALLEABLE THAN EDDE, IT IS PRESUMED JUMBLATT WOULD OPT FOR EDDE AS AGAINST CHEHABIST

ELIAS SARKIS. EDDE'S PROBLEM IS HOSTILITY TOWARD HIM BY CHRISTIAN RIGHTISTS AND ESPECIALLY BY FRANGIE. EDDE MAR 15 CAME OUT WITH STRONG ANTI-FRANGIE STATEMENT, INDICATING HE SEES HIS CHANCES OF BEING SUCCESSOR AS FAIRLY GOOD.

4. SARKIS IS THE OTHER LEADING CONTENDER, BEING SUPPOSED FAVORITE TO SYRIANS, KATAEB, AND ARMY COMMAND. KATAEB AND OTHER CHRISTIANS MAY BOOST CAMILLE CHAMOUN AT FIRST, BUT MAINLY TO HAVE A POSITION TO FALL BACK FROM. SARKIS HAS PROBLEM WITH ARMY, HOWEVER, IN THAT AL-AHDAB AND OTHERS CANNOT AT THIS STAGE IGNORE JUMBLATT'S WISHES. JUMBLATT IS CREDITED WITH BEING INSTRUMENTAL IN THE AHDAB-KHATIB MERGER AND HAS BECOME A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH, REVERSING HIS INITIAL HOSTILITY TO THE COUP WITH CHARACTERISTIC ADROITNESS.

5. IF DEADLOCK BETWEEN SARKIS AND EDDE DEVELOPS, NEGOTIATIONS MAY HAVE TO TURN TO SOME OTHER MARONITE, SUCH AS JEAN AZIZ. HE HAS FEW ENEMIES AND HAS BEEN PRAISED IN PAST BY JUMBLATT.

6. THIS TORTUOUS BARGAINING FACES CONSTANT THREAT OF MILITARY OUTBREAK ON MAJOR SCALE. EXTREMELY DANGEROUS BRINKSMANSHIP GAME IS UNDERWAY INVOLVING TROOP MOVEMENTS AND MILITARY PREPARATIONS. FOCUS IS PRESIDENTIAL PALACE, WHICH CHRISTIAN MILITIAS AND POSSIBLY SYRIANS PLEDGED TO DEFEND AND COUP LEADERSHIP THREATENING TO ATTACK. NEARLY ALL ARMED MILITIAS ARE BACK ON STREETS OF BEIRUT, WHICH REMAINS TENSE CITY DESPITE RELATIVE EASING MAR 15. MOST OBSERVERS DO NOT EXPECT MAJOR OUTBREAK NEXT 24 HOURS. CLASHES ALREADY OCCURRING SPORADICALLY IN HOTEL DISTRICT AND SOME CENTRAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 BEIRUT 02336 161421Z

EASTERN QUARTERS, HOWEVER, ARE ENOUGH TO EEP CITIZENRY ON EDGE. EXCHANGE OF FIRE OCCASIONALLY SEVERE.

7. GENERAL PICTURE IS ONE OF STANDSTILL WHILE SEARCH GOES ON FOR WAY OUT OF THE MESS AND FURTHER SYRIAN MEDIATION AWAITED. A KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCE HAS TOLD US SYRIAN DELEGATION IS DEFINITELY COMING MAR 16 OR 17. LAMBRAKIS

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